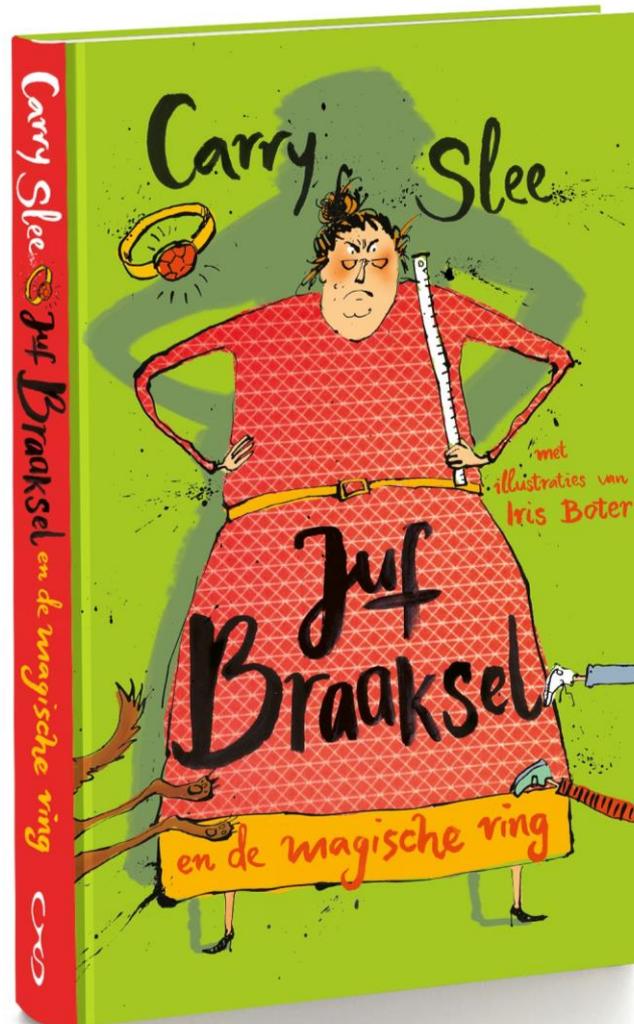


Miss Puke and the Magic Ring

Sample translation (pp. 95-115)



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Chapter 11

Feeling miserable, Lotte left the house. For the first time ever, she was dreading going to school – not because of Miss Evi, but because there was to be a dictation test this morning. She had been so upset the night before that she had struggled to memorize all the difficult words. Now she was worried she would get a bad grade again. What would Miss Evi think of her then?

"It's ready!" cried Thijs when she came outside. "Our raft is ready! My father helped me last night and now it's finished. We can take it out onto the water tonight."

Lotte's spirits rose immediately. She thought about how cool it would be to go on the raft. And Fred didn't need her this afternoon because he was going to his mother's to help her out with odds and ends in her house. Lotte had never met Fred's mother before. "I'll introduce you to my mother soon," Fred had said when he first moved in. But somehow it had never happened.

"That's awesome!" said Lotte as she got on her bike.

"We'll pick up Max right after school," said Thijs, "and then we'll rush over to my house."

All they could talk about the whole way to school was their raft and how cool it was that they could finally sail to the island. Once they reached the schoolyard, however, Lotte's mind turned once again to the dictation they were about to have.

"What's the matter?" asked Thijs when he saw the worried look on Lotte's face.

"I didn't study enough for today's dictation," said Lotte.

"I did," said Thijs. "I'll put my notebook towards the edge of my desk so you can copy my answers."

Most of the students were already seated when Sanne walked into the class.

When they saw Sanne's radiant expression, Lotte and Thijs immediately recalled that it was Sanne's birthday today. She was carrying a basket that gave off mouthwatering smells.

"I ran into Miss Puke in the hallway," said Sanne. "Luckily she didn't see anything."

Miss Evi came up to Sanne. "Congratulations, young woman. We'll sing happy birthday to you in a minute, but first we have our dictation."

Miss Evi passed out the forms for the dictation. As Lotte leafed through hers, she thought about the fact that she had received an A for every dictation except the week before, when she got an F.

"Everyone has their bad days," Miss Evi had said to her. But Lotte knew that she would also be failing today's dictation. Thijs said he would let her copy his answers, but that would be of no help if the teacher made them place their desks further apart from each other, as she had done last week. Lotte looked anxiously at the teacher...maybe she would be lucky this time and they would be allowed to stay where they were.

"Okay, everyone move your desks away from each other," said Miss Evi. "I know how tempting it is to peek at each other's answers because I used to do that myself when I was your age."

The whole class laughed except Lotte. *Great! There goes my chance at getting a decent grade,* she thought to herself.

The teacher walked around the classroom as she read out the lines of the dictation. She paused when she got to Lotte's desk. *Now she can see I've gotten everything wrong,* thought Lotte, wishing she could crawl into a hole right then and there. But Miss Evi said nothing.

"Now it's time for the birthday girl to come to the front of the class," said the teacher after she had collected all the dictation papers. "We'll sing very softly for you."

They sang happy birthday to Sanne so softly that there was no way Miss Buke could have heard them.

Sanne pulled out her box of beautifully decorated cupcakes. "I baked them myself this morning," she said. "And decorated them myself, too."

Everyone started chatting away and before they knew it they had forgotten all about Miss Buke's strict rule against celebrating birthdays and began making much too much noise. Suddenly, the classroom door opened and Miss Buke came into the room sniffing.

In a split second, the whole class went quiet. Lotte threw a worried look over at Thijs. If Miss Buke found out that Miss Evi had broken one of her rules, she might get kicked out of the school. *Oh, do something Miss Evi!*, prayed Lotte.

Miss Evi grabbed the box of cupcakes, swiftly concealing it in the bottom drawer of her desk. *How clever of Miss Evi*, thought Lotte. *I just hope Miss Puke doesn't think to look in the drawers.*

"The whole hallway smells of cake," said Miss Buke. "It was not difficult to catch you in the act, Miss Evi. I only needed to follow the scent. Where is the treat?"

"I smell that sweetness too," responded Miss Evi. "Could it be coming from outside?"

"You cannot deceive me, Miss Evi!" said Miss Buke. "It's someone's birthday in here."

Bending over Sanne and sniffing all the while, Miss Buke inspected her basket. But there was no sign of a cake. As the children held their breath, Miss Buke searched the entire classroom but was unable to find anything.

"I don't understand," she grumbled. "My nose has never failed me." Her eyes strayed over to Miss Evi's desk.

"I think I know where you hid the treat, Miss Evi." Miss Buke opened the top drawer but could find nothing. The entire class sat petrified. *Just leave now!*, they thought to themselves. Miss Buke hesitated and then opened the second drawer. *No!* The class could take it no longer as they watched Miss Buke grab the handle of the bottom drawer.

Thijs was the only one who was looking at Miss Evi. As soon as Miss Buke opened the drawer, Miss Evi rubbed her finger, the same way she had done with Willem. As Miss Buke peered into the drawer, Thijs looked as well. He was the only one in the class who could see the drawer because he was sitting at the front of the class to the left. The drawer where Miss Evi had hid the cupcakes was empty.

Miss Buke shut the drawer and stomped out of the class, grumbling.

"It worked!" said Miss Evi. "I hid the cupcakes all the way in the back of the drawer and she didn't see it!"

"Yay!" cried the children.

But Thijs knew that this was not true.

"You can take your cupcakes out of the drawer now, Sanne," said Miss Evi.

As Sanne opened the drawer, Thijs looked carefully at Miss Evi's hand and saw her rub her finger once again. But now he saw more clearly that it was her *ring* that she rubbed, not her finger. Sanne peered into the drawer and found the box of cupcakes exactly where Miss Evi had put them.

Everyone ate with relish the cupcakes that Sanne had baked— everyone, that is, except Thijs, who could barely taste what he was eating. He was so confused by what he

had just seen. If what he thought he had seen was true, then there had to be some kind of magical power in that ring that Miss Evi had. Was he just imagining it or did she really rub that ring?

When the school bell rang, Miss Evi said: "You can all go outside now." She turned to Lotte and said, "Lotte, can I talk to you for a minute?"

Stunned, Lotte stayed behind. What would Miss Evi say to her? Did she maybe know about Fred? Maybe she had seen her do it.

"Lotte," said the teacher when everyone was out of the classroom, "I'm beginning to worry about you. You haven't been doing well in school lately. What's wrong?"

Lotte shrugged her shoulders.

"You know you can tell me anything, don't you?" said the teacher.

Lotte bit her lip. It was difficult to keep her mouth shut, especially because Miss Evi was so nice. But she couldn't tell her her secret – she couldn't tell anyone.

"You seem distracted these days," said the teacher. "Dictation is difficult, I know, but there are so many more mistakes in your work than I'm used to seeing. Isn't there something you want to tell me? If I know what's going on, maybe I could help you." The teacher looked at her kindly.

How she longed to tell Miss Evi everything! "It's nothing," Lotte said. "I'll try harder for the next test."

"Go on outside, then," said the teacher. "Just remember that I'll always be here for you when you need help."

"Okay, Miss," said Lotte and walked out of the room.

As the teacher read out loud from the gripping book the class was reading, Thijs was still mulling over what he had seen. During recess, he hadn't dared to tell anyone about it – not even Lotte. He was afraid she would laugh at him. He first had to know whether what he *thought* he had seen was true. If it was, then he would tell Lotte.

He could barely wait for the school bell to ring. When it did and everyone started leaving the classroom, Thijs lingered at his desk.

"Is anything wrong, Thijs?" asked Miss Evi when everyone had left the room.

Thijs nodded.

"You can tell me."

"It's about this morning, Miss. When you hid the cupcakes in the drawer."

"Do you think it wasn't right of me to do that to Miss Buke? Are you bothered by the fact that I tricked her?"

"No, Miss, that's not what's bothering me. I thought what you did was awesome, actually. What I don't understand is that you hid the box in the drawer, which I could see from where I was sitting, and when Miss Buke opened the drawer, the box was suddenly gone. And it wasn't that it was hidden way in the back of the drawer – it was simply gone. You did that. You did something with your ring."

For a moment, Thijs was afraid that Miss Evi was going to be angry with him. But she wasn't angry. In her surprise, she had dropped her chalk.

She looked Thijs straight in the eyes. "You're right, Thijs," said Miss Evi. "I made the box of cupcakes invisible."

For a while, both Miss Evi and Thijs remained silent.

"But magic doesn't really exist, Miss. Only in fairy tales, right?" said Thijs.

"You're right, Thijs. I can't do magic." Miss Evi glanced towards the door to make sure that the coast was clear. "Listen," she said. "I'm going to let you in on a big secret: I can make things invisible."

"With your ring," said Thijs. "It has magical powers."

"Not just magical powers," said Miss Evi. "It also contains an invention that my father made."

"Was your father an inventor?"

"He was," said Miss Evi. "But he also had magical powers. He realized from a young age that he could do things like levitate objects. He wanted his power to be used positively for things that would benefit people. So he decided to become an inventor. One day he discovered how to make things invisible. He put his invention in this ring, and he gave it to me."

"Why didn't he make a bunch of those rings and sell them? He would have been a millionaire," said Thijs.

"He didn't want that," said the teacher. "He was afraid that it would end up in the wrong hands and that those people would do bad things with it. That's why he gave it to me."

"Can *you* sell it, then?" asked Thijs.

"No," said Miss Evi. "He knew I would become a teacher and he told me to use the ring to help children."

Thijs was at a loss for words.

"Now you know my secret," said the teacher.

"Have you told anyone else about this?"

"No," she said. "My father didn't want me to. But you figured it out yourself and I'm sure my father wouldn't have wanted me to lie to you. And I don't want to lie either. I care too much for my students. I know I can trust you."

"I won't tell anyone, Miss, I swear."

Chapter 12

Lotte ran out to the raft, dressed in her swimsuit. "Wicked!" she said. "It looks absolutely fabulous!"

Thijs's parents had also come outside to have a look. "What a great job you've done, kids!" said his father.

"Thijs did most of the work," said Lotte.

Thijs shrugged. "Who cares? It's finished."

"Well, have a good time, kids," said his father.

"Be careful you two, okay?" said his mother. "I don't want you going beyond the first island. Understood?"

"Oh, come on, what could possibly happen?" said his father. "They can both swim. But mommy's right, the first island is far enough. You two must be super excited. Good luck!" Thijs's parents went inside the house.

As soon as they grabbed their paddles, Max jumped onto the raft.

"Let's go!" said Thijs. They untied the rope that had been securing the raft, hopped onto it, and pushed it away from the shore.

Lotte had been looking forward to this for so long. It had been her dream to sail across the lake together with Thijs. She had thought they would have to wait a long time for Thijs to get a boat, but now the raft was ready and they were actually on the water. Together with Max, she jumped off the raft and into the water.

She was so excited about rafting that she didn't even notice that Thijs was staring emptily into space. He was still pondering what the teacher had said. He had promised not to tell anyone, but it was so difficult for him not to tell Lotte about something as exciting as this. They never kept secrets from each other. Should he tell her after all? He was sure that Lotte would tell no one else. What should he do?

"Aren't you going to swim?" asked Lotte.

"In a bit," said Thijs.

"No, now!" said Lotte with a laugh as she pulled Thijs into the water.

"I'm gonna get you!" Thijs grinned as he climbed back onto the raft. He tried to grab Lotte, but she swiftly swam away.

Suddenly Thijs realized something. "Hey, Lotte, we've gone way past the first island."

"Oh no," said Lotte as she climbed back onto the raft. "We promised your mother not to go further."

Thijs looked behind him. "You can't even see our house anymore. That makes it even more exciting!"

They went a bit further, circling the next island until they found a place where they could moor the raft. Max was the first to jump off. Thijs set one foot on the island and pulled the raft up to the edge. The three of them walked around, following a path that ran the perimeter of the island.

"It looks like no-one has been on this island for a long time," said Thijs. The footpath they were on was overgrown with shrubbery, and in some places it was impossible to walk through.

Suddenly they heard Max bark.

"He's found something," said Lotte. She recognized his excited barking.

"I hope it's not something scary," said Thijs. "Like a dead body or something. Why don't we head back to the raft?"

"No," said Lotte, "I want to see what it is." She walked in the direction of Max's barking, which was coming from the other side of the bushes.

The shrubbery had completely covered the footpath, so they had to push the thicket aside with their arms. They could tell from the barking that Max was nearby. After a few steps, they saw it: hidden behind the bushes was a wooden hut.

"Good boy, Max!" said Lotte, petting Max. The door to the hut was loose, which meant there was nothing stopping them from going inside.

"This is cool!" cried Thijs.

"This is *super* cool!" said Lotte. "It looks like this hut has been abandoned."

"Not anymore, 'cuz it's our hut now." He ran back to the raft to retrieve the flag.

When he returned to the hut, he placed the flag on the roof. "There," he said. "It's ours." Together they walked into the hut to have a look.

"It's not that big," said Thijs, "but we can stand in it at least."

"These spyholes are wicked!" said Lotte. "We can see everything but no one can see us."

"We need to fix the door," said Thijs. "And there are holes in the roof and the floor." He tapped his fingers against the wooden walls. "We're going to fix you up, don't worry."

"Now we have a secret place for real," said Thijs as they sat down inside the hut. "We're not letting anyone know about this."

"Awesome!" said Lotte. "A place just for ourselves and Max. Actually, can Willem come here once? If we wants to, at least."

"Sure," said Thijs. "He would never jump off the raft. And we would never lose him here, 'cuz kittens don't go in the water."

Thijs looked at Lotte. Now that they had a secret place, how could he possibly keep anything a secret from her? Suddenly he realized that Lotte had to know. "This is our secret place," he said. "And here's where I'm going to let you in on a secret."

Lotte looked at him in surprise. "You mean you have a secret?" She thought she knew everything that Thijs knew.

"It's not my secret," said Thijs. "It's Miss Evi's secret."

"Miss Evi's?" Lotte was flabbergasted.

"Yeah, I know something about her that no one else knows," said Thijs.

"Who told you?" asked Lotte. "And how do you know it's true?"

"Because she told me herself."

"When?"

"This afternoon, when I stayed on in the classroom after school. No one can know about it, though. I promised Miss Evi. But I still think I should tell you. You can't tell anyone, and I mean no one. Swear that you won't."

Lotte held up two fingers. "I swear I won't tell anyone."

"Okay," said Thijs. And as they sat there in their secret hut, he told her what he had seen.

"That's not possible," said Lotte. "You must have imagined it. There's no way that ring could have done that." Then Thijs told her what the teacher had confided in him.

Lotte listened with her mouth opened wide. "So Miss Evi's ring has magical powers..." she said, once Thijs had finished telling his story. "I can't believe it."

"Yeah," said Thijs. "Miss Evi's father had magical powers. That's why he became an inventor."

"Wow!" said Lotte. "And how impressive that you discovered her secret." She was quiet for a while and then she said, "How sweet of Miss Evi's father to give her his secret so that she could help children. I'll never tell anyone, never. I swear."

"When we're done fixing the hut, we have to swear that we won't tell the teacher's secret to anyone," said Thijs. "We should do it with blood, agreed?"

Lotte nodded.

"And we should also swear that we'll never tell anyone about this place," said Thijs. "Agreed?"

"Yeah, I agree," said Lotte in a solemn voice.

"And another thing...we have to be honest with each other all the time," said Thijs. "We're best friends, so we should never keep secrets from each other. Agreed?"

Lotte blushed. Thinking about her own secret made her stomach churn. Did she have to tell Thijs about that? But she didn't dare. What should she do? Thijs had told her *his* secret about Miss Evi; how could she now sincerely say that she wouldn't keep secrets from him?

"Agreed or what?" asked Thijs insistently.

What should she do?

At that moment, Max barked, causing Thijs to cringe. Lotte crept out of the hut to see what was there.

"Was someone there?" asked Thijs when she got back to the hut.

"I think he just saw a duck," said Lotte.

Chapter 13

"Have a nice afternoon, everyone!" said Miss Evi when the school bell rang signaling the end of the day. She walked down the hall together with Lotte, Thijs, and a couple of other classmates. Six of them stayed behind at the coat rack until Miss Evi reached the teachers' room.

"Quick!" said Daan. "Before she comes out again." They all ran straight into the 'surprise room', a name that Mr Jaap had bestowed on the room. Whenever the students had to practice for a play or a surprise performance for their teachers, they were allowed to use this room to practice in. They were now about to put together their big surprise for Miss Evi. If they were to see to it that she received the prize for the nicest teacher in the county, they had until five o'clock to submit their booklet to the town hall.

"Does the booklet include letters from all of us?" asked Lotte. She looked down at the list of names. All of them were checked off.

"Awesome!" said Bram. "Now it's time to punch the holes."

"Where's the ribbon?" asked Daan.

"I have it," said Lotte, pulling out a beautiful yellow ribbon from her bag. They all knew that yellow was Miss Evi's favourite colour.

After the holes were punched, Zoë skillfully threaded the ribbon through the holes. It was a beautiful booklet. All the classmates had written a personal letter – complete with lovely drawings – explaining why they loved their teacher and why there wasn't a better teacher around.

"The cover page is still blank," said Thijs. "No one can tell that this booklet is about Miss Evi."

"Anna's picking up the cover page from her grandfather's place now," said Zoë. "He painted the teacher's name and the name of the school on it, but it still wasn't dry last night."

"Do you like the way I tied the ribbon?" Zoë held the booklet up for everyone to see.

Just then the door opened and Miss Buke walked in with an angry look on her face. "I've caught you in the act! I bet you locked yourselves in here to cause some kind of mischief. Well, you're dealing with the wrong person if you think you can get away with it. It's strictly forbidden to fraternize with each other after schooltime."

"But this is the surprise room," said Daan. "Anyone planning a surprise for their teacher is allowed to come in here to work on it."

"A surprise for your teacher?" said Miss Buke. "A well-written report or excellent marks for your dictation – *that's* what I call a surprise for your teacher. I am hereby officially revoking this room's function as the surprise room. I'll put up an announcement on the notice board in the hallway tomorrow. What's that you have there?" She grabbed the booklet out of Zoë's hands and read a few pages.

"It's for the competition for the best teacher," said Lotte. "We're going to bring it to the town hall now."

"I know exactly what to do with this," said Miss Buke furiously. She walked out of the room with the booklet still in her hand.

They all looked at each other, stunned.

Lotte ran after her. "Miss Buke, could we please have that back? Otherwise we won't be able to get it to the town hall in time."

"Not a chance. Go home, shoo. Get busy with your homework."

"There's no way we're getting it back," said Lotte when she returned to the others. "What are we going to do now?"

"There's no time to write new letters," said Zoë.

"We have to find a way to save that booklet," said Daan. "Before she puts it through the shredder. I'm going to go have a look. Maybe she's left her office and it's still on her desk."

"I'm coming with you," said Bram. Together they crept along the corridor.

The others stayed behind, waiting anxiously to see if they came back with the booklet.

"Well?" they asked when the boys returned.

"Her door is locked," said Bram. "We couldn't see anything."

"Oh, never mind," said Zoë. "It sucks but there isn't anything we can do about it. Better luck next year."

"Yeah," said Thijs, "let's go home. She might see us in here still and then we would get detention for weeks."

A few minutes later they were standing by the gate, thoroughly dejected.

"Let's go," said Daan.

"But wait, Anna will be here any minute," said Zoë.

Just then, Anna biked up to them on Mr Jaap's errands bike. "I got a flat tire," she said, "so I borrowed this thing. But I've got it: my grandpa did a great job with the cover page."

And all for nothing! They told Anna what had just happened.

"You're joking, right?" said Anna. But she could tell from their faces that it was true. "Now we have no gift for Miss Evi. And my grandpa worked so hard! Let me at least show you how beautiful it came out!" Anna reached into the cyclebag on Mr Jaap's bike.

"Huh?? What's this?" She pulled out not only the cover page but also a pencil case.

"Hey, that's mine!" said Bram. "I thought I had lost it." He looked into the pencil case. "And the money's still in it!"

"Yay!" they all shouted.

And Anna said: "Now we can buy those beautiful earrings for Miss Evi after all."